

FRIDAY

DECEMBER 8, 2006


Nursing home legislation

Rodeschin wants more
beds; Converse won't
discuss his proposal

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Two local lawmakers plan to introduce separate bills that could bring changes to the county nursing home.

One, sponsored by state Rep. Beverly Rodeschin, R-Newport, would boost the facility's bed count. The other, sponsored by state Rep. Larry Converse, D-Claremont,

 **Unity** remains something of a mystery.

Rodeschin said Thursday that at the request of County Manager Ed Gil de Rubio, she plans to ask the state office of legislative services to draft a bill that would allow the county to add up to 15 beds.

The increase would bring the home's bed total to 171 and require the county to renovate the now-empty Sanders wing, where Gil de Rubio said he hopes to house a unit of respite and hospice residents.

The county manager said the facility currently has no beds permanently set aside for hospice and has been unable to meet the community demand for respite care, which can give much needed breaks to those caring for loved ones at

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home.

"We're filling up our beds so much we can't guarantee any booking in the future," he said. "You call us and say 'I'm thinking of taking a vacation in February, do you have a bed?'"

If the legislature approves the addition, Gil de Rubio said it would only be a step toward more respite and hospice beds at Sullivan County Health Care. Many details, such as how the county plans to pay for the Sanders renovations, still have to be worked out.

"We're taking the first step to get the allocation of beds then we'll look at how to fund this," Gil de Rubio said.

Converse already has filed his legislative service request, or LSR, which is titled "relative to the Sullivan County Nursing home."

"There's nothing in there that is going to hurt anybody," Converse said Thursday.

That is about all Converse will say on the matter. In an *Eagle Times* election profile, he said he planned to introduce a bill "to allow the Executive committee of delegations to guide the County Commissioners on hiring the Health Care Administrator."

But Converse declined to discuss the LSR when Gil de Rubio and Don Clarke, chairman of the county Board of Commissioners, asked about it at Tuesday's board meeting. And there is no rule that says he has to.

The filing of an LSR merely is the beginning of the process by which Legislative Services lawyers turn lawmakers' ideas into bills, Carol Holahan, the agency's director, said.

Often times, a bill goes through several drafts before

legislators are satisfied that it reflects their intent and sign off on it. Until that point, Holahan said the content of LSRs are not public information.

"Until it is a finished product, the public does not get to see it," she said.

Though Converse contends that also means he should remain tight-lipped about

what he hopes his nursing home legislation will accomplish, Holahan said representatives are free to discuss LSRs as they wish.

"That's their prerogative," she said.

And it is a right that most legislators choose to exercise. Rodeschin, for instance, said she plans to introduce bills that would forbid insurance companies from denying coverage to or increasing premiums for volunteer drivers, among other legislation, she said.

"Any legislation I have requested ... I have never made confidential," Rodeschin said. "We're doing the public's business and for someone to turn around and tell them they're not going to tell them what they're doing, it draws suspicion."

Irritation too. While Converse may be within his rights as a lawmaker, Gil de Rubio said that he had stepped over the line of acting good faith.

"He's introduced legislation relating to the county nursing home and common courtesy is to let ... the county commissioners and county manager know what

is going on," he said.

The snub is especially unwelcome in light of a recent goal-setting session in which the

commissioners made repairing their relationship with the county delegation a high priority, Gil de Rubio said.

The groups over the past two years have at times been at odds over the very subject Converse

took up in his LSR. At the heart of the matter is the commissioner's decision in late 2004 to seek the help of an outside consultant, Genesis HealthCare, in running the county nursing home.

The move was made without input from the county's state representatives, who do not set policy for the county but sign off on its budget each year. Several members of the delegation, Converse included, have been vocal opponents of Genesis' involvement in Sullivan County Health Care.

"I'm not going to hold the entire delegation accountable based on the unprofessional methods Representative Converse has chosen to use," Gil de Rubio said.

But, he added, "I would hope the chairman of the delegation would sit down and have a serious talk with him."

Friday is the last day for representatives to file LSRs for the upcoming legislative session.

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Ed Gil de Rubio
Sullivan County Manager